

1 Pluralistic U.S. and global societies are the context within which Christians relate to people of other faiths.

Christians live among people grounded in other religions and ideologies, or in none. If our immediate circle of neighbors or friends does not reveal the religious plurality of the world, we need look no further than our cities, our nation, and our globally-connected world to see the diverse religious traditions which increasingly intermingle there. In this environment, persons and communities affect one another even when they are unaware of doing so.

2 God is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our world.

God's Spirit works in surprising places throughout creation and is found even among people who are unaware of the Spirit's presence.

The Creator endows all persons with God's own image and has pronounced the world "good" in its wholeness and integrity. God wills that, in newness of life, the world and its inhabitants live according to the intent of their Creator. Even when we have failed or have not affirmed God's presence, God continues to be present in the world. We are called to attend to God's work not only in our own lives but also throughout creation and in all God's creatures.

3 We are called to work with others in our pluralistic societies for the well-being of our world and for justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation. We do so in the faith that, through God's Spirit, the Church is a sign and means of God's intention for the wholeness and unity of humankind and of all creation.

At a time when the cultural hegemony of the Christian religion in many parts of the world is waning, we may have new roles among other people.

- When religion is used for purposes of power, and when religion is manipulated as an instrument of conflict, our role is to be peacemakers and peacekeepers.
- When all inhabitants of the planet bear joint responsibility for its life (e.g., for the environment or the globalized economy), our role is to cooperate with others in seeking mutually acceptable ethical standards for behavior.
- When privilege is granted to some and denied others, our role is to be advocates for others' freedom, just as Jesus approached others with full awareness of their freedom.
- When persecution is unleashed upon fellow Christians or upon other religious communities, our role is to champion the cause of those marginalized by their minority status and to practice our own faith in ways that do not abridge the freedoms of others.

4 In our pluralistic world, we confess that Jesus is the truth and the way; through him God gives life. Jesus does not point to truth but is the truth, in his person. Jesus' life showed the limits of religious words and propositions as objects of our loyalties. Jesus made us aware of the truth found in knowing God relationally.

- When we seek to discern God's presence in the world, we look to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the unique and sufficient revelation of God's love, grace, truth, power, and righteousness. Jesus is Lord and Savior.
- When God gives us courage to engage in the giving and receiving--the listening and speaking--of dialogue, Jesus is present. Through the power of his Spirit, we are enabled to be truly ourselves in authentic relationships.

5 We are called to relate to people of other faiths in full humility, openness, honesty, and respect.

We respect both others' God-given humanity and the seriousness of their spiritual quests and commitments. It is our Christian faith in the Triune God and our intention to live like Jesus, not our cultural standards, that require this of us.

- We recognize that all religions, including our own, stand under the judgment of God and we acknowledge our own sins against others both in the historical past and in our own times. These realities keep us from condemnation of others while they encourage our own commitment to the Christ who forgives and reconciles.
- We recognize that our culture relativizes and privatizes all religion--propagating marketplace attitudes toward religious choices. We pray for God's power to live in firm commitment without trampling upon the God-given freedom that Jesus respected and challenged in all persons. In our journey, we are helped by ecumenical partners around the world who, with us, are part of the church yet who live with different cultural values.
- We recognize the integrity of others' religious traditions yet we avoid any attempt to create some new religious community by merging our separate identity with theirs.

- When we interact with others personally, Jesus offers reconciliation, healing, teaching. Through his body, the church, he extends his ministry of love.
- When we confess our faith, Jesus is proclaimed as our salvation. Through him we share joyously the good news of life abundant, with its invitation to receive.
- When we hear God's love for the world proclaimed, the risen Jesus makes that love real and enables us to believe that God wills salvation for all who will receive it. In Christ are hidden all wisdom and knowledge and in him all things come together (Col. 2:2-3).

6 We need to be equipped to meet others in dialogue and witness. This calls for understanding our own confession deeply, adopting appropriate forms of witness, and acting sensitively upon issues requiring pastoral care. As we meet one another in dialogue, we face our own needs.

- We need to explore theologically the significance of Jesus Christ in our present-day pluralistic world.
- We need to learn to articulate our faith (personal and corporate) in ways that can be understood by others, that recognize both our own and others' experiences.
- We need to learn about and understand the religions to which others adhere. Because our witness is relational and dialogical, we ask others to teach us who they are.
- We need to discern idolatries of race, nation, or philosophy that may become demonic forces in human life. Idolatrous ideologies may be present in any religious system, including our own.
- We need to acknowledge that our fundamental relationship is to persons, not religions and systems.
- We need to listen for others' concerns so that we may minister to human needs in our common public life, interreligious families, and shared religious celebrations.
- We need to recognize that others' religions have brought them comfort, identity, and meaning. We are not called to approach others in judgment but in awareness of God's limitless love and grace.

Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue adopted by 211th General Assembly (1999)

Resources

Presbyterian Church in the U.S., *A Study of Universalism*. 112th General Assembly (1972). PDS 70-420-98-010

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Building Community Among Strangers*. 211th General Assembly (1999). PDS OGA-99-028

Brochures from the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (on-line at www.pcusa.org/interfaith/tools.htm):

Children of Interfaith Families
PDS 74-292-02-006

Christians and Jews
PDS 74-292-01-001

Christians and Muslims
PDS 74-292-04-002

Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue
PDS 74-292-02-005

Interfaith Celebration, Prayer, and Worship
PDS 74-292-97-010

Interfaith Marriage
PDS 74-292-97-008

Interfaith Participation
PDS 74-292-97-007

Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints
PDS 74-292-97-009

Witness and Evangelism Among People of Other Faiths
PDS 74-292-01-003

“As much as I can, [with people of other religions] I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow-minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord’s welcome and acceptance of me.”

“The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Study Catechism (#52,49)

“Central to the ongoing story of the Bible is God’s long-term, patient, merciful purpose of recreating a human community in which the love of God and neighbor becomes a fact of history.

“In the spirit of Jesus Christ, we are called to maintain a respectful presence with people of other faiths. We commit ourselves to meet such persons with gentleness and humility and to seek to learn more about the worshiping practices and faiths that they represent as a way of deepening our own. And we acknowledge that we are called, by the God who created us and the world in which we live, to remain faithful in our proclamation of the gospel in Jesus Christ, and to work with others irrespective of their practices and faith commitments, toward a world marked by justice and peace and in which the whole creation is nurtured and protected.”

Building Community Among Strangers

PRESBYTERIAN PRINCIPLES FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



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